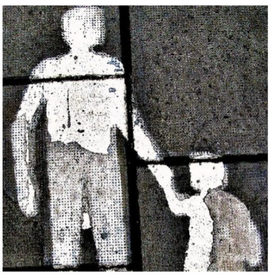
The Career Father



My adventures as a freelancer have brought me back to the place 'between clients.' The point where we trust God's providence for our daily bread fully – as we ought to always – because efforts at the moment feel particularly in vain. Apparently this was something I was to consider this Lenten season.

I can't say I have much of a career that can be defined as a pattern of work. I've worked in IT, management, retail management, government jobs, and so forth. Even 'award-winning board game designer' is in there now. There is no particular pattern that I can use to define myself by my work. Except maybe writing, which as a communication medium just seems necessary in every job, and sometimes it is part of the title.

I did not set out to define myself this way, but I guess my career is my family. I'm a career husband and father. The job is always second, which might irk some employers, but my loyalty lies at home.

There's a passage from Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* series – from the book *Xenocide* to be exact, that explains it much more poetically than I could. It is a piece of an interview between Ender's sister, Valentine, and his stepson Olhando.

> "I saw what Andrew (Ender) did in our family. I saw that he came in and listened and watched and understood who we were, each individual one of us. He tried to discover our need and then supply it. He took responsibility for other people and it didn't seem to matter to him how much it cost him. And in the end, while he could never make the Ribeira family normal, he gave us peace and pride and identity. Stability. He married Mother and was kind to her. He loved us all. He was always there when we wanted him, and seemed unhurt by it when we didn't. He was firm with us about expecting civilized behavior, but never indulged his whims at our expense. And I thought: This is so much more important than science. Or politics, either. Or any particular profession or accomplishment or thing you can make. I thought: If I could just make a good family, if I could just learn to be to other children, their whole lives, what Andrew was, coming so late into ours, then that would mean more in the long run, it would be a finer accomplishment than anything I could ever do with my mind or hands."
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> "So you're a career father," said Valentine.
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> "Who works at a brick factory to feed and clothe the family. Not a brick-maker who also has kids. Lini also feels the same way… She followed her own road to the same place. We do what we must to earn our place in the community, but we live for the hours at home. For each other, for the children."

I'm not the provider for my family. That is ultimately God's job for all of us. I do the work I must, and one way or another we have what we need. If I did define myself by my ability to provide, that would be depressing. Not only in the dry spells but even in the glory of accomplishment; for no matter what I may write, or do with my life it will be nothing compared to what I can be for my children.

I've sort of stumbled into this path, but if more of us chose it from the outset, it would change the world.

Paul Nowak

Paul Nowak is a husband and father of 7, who also happens to be a writer and author. He has written *The Way of the Christian Samurai* among other books.

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